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AUTHOR Archibald, Charles W., Jr.
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ABSTRACT

A proposed solution to "the Indian problem" of economic dependence and psychological crippling, in comparison with the tragedy of the white man's well meaning "common sense" approach to "Get them into the Mainstream", is geared to the Indian's traditional orientation. The 18-year history of the Bureau of Indian Affairs relocation program will be used to illustrate the shortcomings of urban life for a people born to a oneness of man and nature, valuing sharing of their goods rather than accumulating, feeling a sense of being rather than competing to be, valuing the warmth of richness of the human relationships of the extended family, valuing the wisdom of the aged, and quietly carrying a dignity in the face of harsh conditions; permitting them to survive, adapt, and change in the hope that government and private supporters will understand the appropriateness of their efforts to reach economic independence in their home areas. The cultural contribution that the Indians can make to the white man if they are permitted to protect their values from being dissolved in complex urban life is considerable. (Author/JM)

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Charles W. Archibald, Jr., ACSW, Mental Health Consultant
USPHS-Albuquerque Area Indian Health Service
500 Gold Ave., SW, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87101

"THE MAINSTREAM--WHERE INDIANS DROWN"
Thursday, 9:00-12:00, Panel 132, Fairmont Hotel

A proposed solution to "the Indian problem" of economic dependence and psychological crippling, comparing the tragedy of the white man's well meaning "common sense" approach of "Get them into the Mainstream" with a plan geared to the Indian's traditional orientation. We will utilize the 18-year history of the Bureau of Indian Affairs relocation program to illustrate the shortcomings of urban life for a people born to a oneness of man and nature, valuing sharing of their goods rather than accumulating, feeling a sense of being rather than competing to be, valuing the warmth of richness of the human relationships of the extended family, valuing the wisdom of the aged, and quietly carrying a dignity in the face of harsh conditions; permitting them to survive, adapt, and change in the hope that government and private supporters will understand the appropriateness of their efforts to reach economic independence in their home areas. The paper will also illustrate the cultural contribution that the Indians can make to the white man if they are permitted to protect their values from being desolved in complex urban life styles.

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THE MAINSTREAM--WHERE INDIANS DROWN

CHARLES W. ARCHIBALD, JR., ACSW, FAOA
MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTANT
USPHS-INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE

PRESENTED AT THE
47TH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE
AMERICAN ORTHOPSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION

It is my intention to propose a solution to a substantial portion of "the Indian problem" of economic dependence and psychological crippling that has continued despite federally administered policies of the dominant society of annihilation, isolation, assimilation, and now the threat of termination. The thought is not new to progressive Indian leaders, but somewhat inconceivable to the average American. It is offered with the humbling awareness that we are generalizing for 600,000 tribally recognized American Indians, speaking over 300 Indian languages and dialects, originating in 24 states. There are marked differences in the traditions of Indians living only a few miles apart, yet they retain values in common that sharply set them apart from non-Indians. Lack of awareness of these Indian characteristics has resulted in the near universal cry from the urban dweller, regardless of where on the spectrum from deep sympathy through guilt to disgust he may be, to "get them into the mainstream" with the presumption that Indians may better themselves to the extent that they incorporate the white man's social values, economic philosophy, and family life style.

I will attempt to illustrate through the experience of Indians in the past 20 years to relocate in major urban centers that this is antipathetic to the

basic beliefs of these people to a point where they have rejected more than a veneer of the white man's conventions despite intermarriage, profession, or diverse social preference.[1] Finally, I will propose a solution to the dilemma, by being receptive to the hopes of Indian leaders to develop their tribally governed communities economically, sufficient to attract investment capital to supplement a shift of federal funds from doles that foster crippling dependency to "seed" money that can free the Indians to live apart with dignity. In the process of learning something of Indian values in order to accept their destiny to be different, the reader may profit from the incorporation of some of the Indian's principles for his own.

The ancestors of these native Americans, one of the three major identifiable minorities in the United States today, with the Blacks (formerly known as American Negros) and the Chicanos (formerly known as Spanish Americans or Mexican Americans), probably entered this hemisphere from Asia about 25,000 years ago, and by 10,000 years ago had spread to the southern tip of South America.[2] The oldest identifiable group today are the Hopis of north central Arizona, functioning 500 years before Columbus much as they do today. The fact that 840,000 Indians are felt to have inhabited this country when Columbus landed speaks well for their capacity

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1. Joan Ablon, "American Indian Relocation: Problems of Dependency and Mangement in the City," Phylon, Vol. 26, No. 4, 1965.
2. Edward Kennedy, "American Indian Days," The Keresan, Vol. 3, No. 34, December 1969.

to survive, adapt, and change in the face of a variety of hardships. The fact that their number had diminished to 243,000 by the latter part of the 19th century, due primarily to war and disease, will forever be a scar on the white man's conscience.

While today efforts of the U. S. Public Health Service to bring modern medical techniques to the Indians have resulted in a birth rate more than double the general U. S. population, and has increased life expectancy at a rate three times the national average (still 6 years short of the average non-Indian),[3] we should not think of the pre-white-man Indians as being helpless victims of their physical environment. Remember, they taught our forebearers how to exist by hunting live game, techniques of successful farming, values of close family life, and folk healing. They gave us their discoveries of cocaine, quinine, novocaine, witch hazel, and many other drugs (in the 400 years that physicians and botanists have been examining and analyzing the flora of America, they have not yet discovered a medicinal herb unknown to the Indians).[4] While most of us accept the power the medicine man possessed through psychological techniques, few may be knowledgeable about the sophisticated dream psychotherapeutic system the

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3. Jean Nowak, "What's Happening with the Indians," HSMHA World, Sept.-Oct. 1969.

4. Edward Kennedy, op. cit.

Iriquois utilized 200 years before Freud.[5] They believed then as thousands privately still do today, that to be sick was to be out of harmony with nature, which only medicine men trained in the folk arts of their tribe could diagnose and cure. Is it any wonder that they resent the white man who has forced change on them by legislating against their old means of survival, and even broken treaties of his authorship when they became inconvenient? How hollow ring the reassuring phrases of those original treaties between the U. S. Government and the sovereign Indian nations, promising freedom from harassment and a fair share of the wealth of their former territorial holdings ". . .as long as the grass is green, and the rivers flow, and the sun sinks in the west."

The majority who "think Indian" retain the primitive world view,[6] recognizing an important and precious relationship between man, his fellows, nature, and the gods. He believes that man is a part of an independent harmonious whole. He is a cog in the larger order of his community and nature, and hence does not have an individual or independent career. The average American can at best only appreciate the beauty of

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5. John Hurst, "A Resurgence of the Indians' Cultural Pride," San Francisco Examiner, July 18, 1969.
6. Robert Redfield, "The Primitive World View," The Primitive World and its Transformations, 1953.

nature, for his philosophy and theology focuses on man's relationship with man and with his gods, bypassing the possibility of an interaction with his natural surroundings.

This handicaps the tourist first viewing an Indian community, for in being struck by the physical signs of poverty he fails to appreciate the wealth of a people who are still attuned to the beauty of nature and feel a rapport and spiritual attachment to the land they inhabit. The uncleanliness of a dirt floor Navajo hogan may be sufficiently repugnant to mask the rich warmth of the human relationships in an extended family. By our yardstick their material possessions are so sparse that they fail to understand how a sense of loyalty and generosity can permit an Indian community to survive on so very little. Can the visitor see beyond the fact of overcrowded homes to recognize the revered presence of grandparents who have an important role to play in the raising of the children as tradition passers? Finally, we may fail to see beyond the idleness and despair to the fierce sense of individual pride and strong expression of autonomy and freedom. Actually we could all gain from an incorporation of the hallmarks of the American Indian's cultural difference -- an interest in people rather than things, a strong feeling of belonging, of a need to share with others, of dignity in harsh circumstance, of a love for nature which is not exploitative, and of measuring a man not by what he has or looks like or says, but by what he

is. These values, which we are often so blind to, makes middle-class America look culturally deprived.[7]

With this as a frame of reference, we move on to those Indians who have objectively seen their reservations as chronically economically underdeveloped areas, have felt forced to abandon the degree of security and social control it represented,[8] and have met the encroaching white culture on its home ground -- the large urban center. There have always been a few who have left the reservation for a time for schooling, military service, and particularly job opportunities, sped on by the missionaries and non-Indian teachers, who have stressed abandonment of the tribal ways as unqualified impediments and unhesitatingly equated relocation in the white man's world with success. World War II moved large numbers of Indian servicemen to within commuting distance of the cities for training, and attracted others to the defense industries. Over twenty years later many of these are the Indian leaders who welcome the newer arrivals who come for schooling, railroad employment, adult vocational training programs (after 1957), and especially the Bureau of Indian Affairs Voluntary Relocation Program (changed to Employment Assistance, but in the Indian mind the key element of the change in environment continuing to identify it).

It began in 1952 with the establishment of ten field relocation offices in

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7. Edward Kennedy, op. cit.
8. Joan Ablon, "Relocated American Indians in the San Francisco Bay Area: Social Interaction and the Indian Identity," Human Organization, Vol. 23, No. 4, 1964.

major cities throughout the country. By 1965 it was estimated that 60,000 American Indians had migrated to seek stable employment and a new life.[9] The cultural shock of leaving primary relationships and a cultural world of folk society to enter the complex industrial order whose basic values violate many of the premises of Indian life was for many overwhelming,[10] and during the early years of relocation 75 percent returned soon to the reservation (this later dropped to 35 percent as the emphasis shifted from immediate job placement to training). Here was "marginal man," clearly caught between two cultures. While he carried a basic distrust of white men, he had been conditioned by the federal government to turn to them for money, services, and sometimes even emotional support.[11] Truly egalitarian relationships with whites occurred infrequently, even on the part of long time Indian city dwellers, although they might work side by side to improve social conditions for constantly arriving Indians.

While the chief reason for relocation was the wish to find steady employment, many of them hoped to escape personal and family problems as well. Those which were external, such as heavy drinking and dependent relatives, might be avoided, but the problems within the relocatees themselves were if anything magnified under the new pressures. Relocation demanded initiative

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9. Joan Ablon, "American Indian Relocation. . ." op. cit.
10. Editorial, The Navajo Times, Oct. 2, 1969.
11. Eileen Maynard, "That These People May Live," Report of Pine Ridge Community Mental Health Program, South Dakota, 1969.

and independence of thought and action, in contrast to the conditioning of their wardship status on the reservation.[12] They had been taught by their people that ones possessions were of value only to the extent that they were shared, and budgeting and saving were foreign to them. Since time was a continuum from birth to death, time schedules were irrelevant, and deferring of economic goals for an extended period of education was little appreciated. They listened to their relocation counselors explain why they must conform to be accepted, but though they observed how members of middle-class urban society had come to see themselves as objects to be shaped to fit the requirements of a complex modern culture, and to be changed to meet goals which hold promises of rewards; they could not accept themselves internally as a malleable entity.[13] Bills for services that had always been provided free flooded them, and a slight illness or job layoff was often enough to send them back to the reservation, fully aware of the depression that must follow the initial reunion joy as they objectively compared the relative economic opportunities in the two locales.

Some Indians do adjust to urban ways of health insurance, extra jobs to get ahead, and the like; but close questioning has disclosed that they do not internalize the new ways -- their basic Indianness is not destroyed.[14] While

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12. Joan Ablon, op. cit.

13. Joan Ablon, op. cit.

14. Joan Ablon, op. cit.

they may master the techniques necessary to handle and manipulate their environment, this thin veneer would be swept aside by the 75 percent who say they would return to their home areas immediately if comparable employment opportunities were available. They feel that they have survived in the alien culture, rather than agreeing with the non-Indians evaluation of their adjustment as success.

Indians do not seek normal friendships with whites in cities.[15] They traditionally look upon them with suspicion as to their motives, a sense of potential dependency, and a fear of white rejection. This contributes to their characteristic reticence in discussing personal matters with non-Indians, which may be interpreted as disinterest, hostility, or dullness. From experience counselors have learned that this can be countered in part by a respectful attitude that invites them to tell their story in their own way, and then to suggest alternative choices rather than presuming to know the best answer for them.[16] While the non-Indian helping person should strive to create an unhurried and pleasant atmosphere, the natural reserve of his client may not take easily to popular anglo forms of humor. The Indian's natural tendency to seek groups of persons most like himself should be accepted, and whites should be content to support these efforts from behind

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15. Joan Ablon, op. cit.

16. Robert L. Leon, "An Emotional and Educational Experience for Urban Migrants," American Journal of Psychiatry, Sept. 3, 1967.

the scenes, rather than to encourage early participation in non-Indian social and recreational groups to overcome the tendency to retain their Indian identification "for their own good." Even the pan-Indian organizations have attracted only a small percentage of the city-based Indians, and where they have influenced some briefly, it is hard to determine whether they are a cohesive force for the development and maintenance of their culture in the city, a structural defensive mechanism, or a terminal phase in the assimilation process. Their focus is still on the Indian nation as a separate people, and on their traditional home areas as locations of choice.

Now that you're wondering how must they feel?
Meaning them that you've chased 'cross
America's movie screens,
Now that you're wondering how can it be real
That the ones you called colorful, noble, and proud,
In your school propaganda
They starve in their splendor,
You've asked for my comment, I simply will render
My country tis of thy people you're dying.

I hope you can respond to the Indian folk singer Buffy Sainte-Marie, "I'm beginning to understand the problem, but what is the solution?" Ultimately independence, or at least equal dependence with other Americans on the federal government for broad services; but not an abortive termination

that would deny our legal and moral commitments to the sad state of economic affairs of most Indian communities. Where oil, uranium, and other natural resources have been found in ample portions on Indian land, standards have been raised far above the subsistence level, and the question becomes academic. The Navajos are one example of Indians who have proven their ability to invest wisely in an independent future. In areas where poor climate, a lack of scenic beauty, relative inaccessibility, and an inability to relinguish the incapacitating dependent role exists we may long maintain some Indian groups on society's disabled list.

For the vast majority of tribal groups there is a sense of expectancy, as they formulate plans to utilize the economic potential of their home communities by surveying the manufacturing and recreational possibilities that will not endanger the life style of their people.[17] With anticipation of personnel needs in hotels, restaurants, community centers, historic ruins, wild life preserves, schools, courts, tribal headquarters and a host of other settings; young Indian people are being sought, selected, and trained to assume positions of leadership in their home communities. Despite earnest efforts to provide training as close to home as possible, relocation will often be necessary. But there will be a big difference, because their goal will be

17. William H. Kelly, "Social and Cultural Considerations in the Development of Manpower Programs for Indians," paper delivered at the National Conference on Manpower Programs for Indians, Kansas City, Missouri, Feb. 16, 1967.

in line with their choice to live and work for and among their people. This "helping people to help themselves" has proven itself abroad in achieving far better relations with the United States than did the international dole which preceded it; again confirming the incongruity "the poor will never forgive you for what you do for them." We have been able to introduce modern technology to meet problems raised by the underdeveloped people of the world without presuming to change their traditional folk ways of living together. It would seem that these lessons are applicable to our dealings with the first Americans.

We cannot undo the wrongs of our forefathers toward the natives of this land who welcomed them with a spirit of sharing as brothers, only to be trampled as impediments to progress. As long as they exist they will remind us of this, while retaining their pride and dignity midst humble material circumstances that would threaten the emotional stability of most of us. Although the rising rate of problem drinking and suicide among the Indians shows that something is wrong in our approach to them to date,[18] can we accept their right to be different enough to invest in the "New Indian" who will tell us what is best for him and ask for our trust and support as he attempts to make the most of limited economic resources?

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18. Edward Dozier, "Problem Drinking Among American Indians, the Role of Sociocultural Deprivation," Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol, Vol. 27, 1966, pp. 72-87.

Aldous Huxley predicted in "Brave New World"[19] that the time would come when the world would change to a sterile and efficient tribute to man's willingness to sacrifice freedom of deed and expression for freedom from responsibility, and that vacations for most could be sought only through mind altering drugs. It was his hope that the Indian communities would retain their potential to recharge our successors with basic human principles, if only as a reminder of what used to be. To do this they cannot be retained as amusement parks manned by skeleton crews of caretakers and concessionaires, but must be the cultural depositories of a viable people.

You are in a position to influence the possibility of this achievement as you engage in conversations about "what the American Indian people are really like" and "what can be done to help them to achieve a more comfortable co-existence with the outside world." The need for a new approach, responsive particularly to their economic objectives is long overdue. For each unique locale we must find where the Indian people are materially and psychologically, and then seek with them for solutions within the framework of the Indian way. We cannot make up for past mistakes, but neither can we defend policies that suggest the Indians are less capable or deserving of the best of our technology to achieve their goals merely because they patiently

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19. Aldous Huxley, "Brave New World," Harper and Brothers, New York, N. Y., 1949.

resist the efforts of the dominant society to absorb them. Finally, let us revitalize and teach the real Indian traditions to our children before they are lost, to the detriment of us all.